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The year 2000: Wet Britain, warm world

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The year 2000 is set to be the wettest year across England and Wales since 1872 according to figures released by the Met Office today. Globally, the current trend of very warm years continues. The global mean surface temperature in 2000 is expected to be similar to 1999; this was the fifth warmest year since records began in 1860. According to a new forecasting technique developed at the Met Office, 2001 is expected to be warmer still.

A number of rainfall records were broken across England and Wales during the year. Notably the year saw the wettest April and wettest autumn since records began in 1766. Currently the annual rainfall total, averaged across England and Wales, is 1192 mm but it seems unlikely the total will pass the 1284 mm recorded in 1872. Central England temperature statistics also reveal another warm, but not record-breaking, year with 2000 likely to rank in the ten warmest years since records began in 1659.

The global statistics, revealed today by the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva, are compiled using data analysed by the Met Office and the University of East Anglia. The global mean temperature is likely to be about 0.32°C above the 1961-90 normal. Since records began 140 years ago only 1998, 1997, 1995 and 1990 have been warmer.

David Parker of the Met Office's Hadley Centre said: "There have now been 22 years in a row with above-average global temperatures. The ten warmest years on record since 1860 have all occurred since 1983, and eight of the top ten have occurred since 1990. When we look at patterns of change, we increasingly believe that a large part of the recent warming is due to fossil fuel burning."

The new Met Office technique to forecast global mean temperatures a year ahead takes account of the intensity of the widely reported El Niño phenomenon in the Pacific. The technique also incorporates increasing amounts of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, in the atmosphere.

Professor Alan Thorpe, Director of the Hadley Centre, said : "Our experimental forecast suggests that, globally speaking, 2001 may be the second warmest year on record, but the warmth will depend on whether the anticipated El Niño develops in the tropical Pacific."

Notes

1. With 13 days remaining in 2000, all figures contained in the news release are provisional. However, the global 'ranking' relative to other years is unlikely to change.

2. The accuracy of the experimental forecast for 2001 depends on the expected development of a relatively strong El Niño during the year.

3. The period over which averages have been calculated is 1961-90.

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